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News Conference by  
Secretary of Defense Harold Brown  
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We have just concluded four days of talks with the leadership of the People's Republic of China and before I leave for Wuhan and Shanghai, I would like to share with you my brief impressions of the trip so far. The talks included not only my meetings but an unprecedentedly wide range of counterpart talks between members of my delegation and Chinese officials. Some of the members of my delegation are here with me and I will direct all the difficult questions to them.

The meetings I had with Premier Hua, Vice Premier Deng, and Vice Premiers Geng Biao and Xu Xiangqian, Foreign Minister Huang Hua and other Chinese officials took in the aggregate over seventeen hours. My associates, including Ambassador Seignious, Secretaries Komer, McGiffert and Dinneen, and Secretary Holbrooke and other members of the party, have been in almost continuous sessions since we arrived. I am particularly pleased that George Seignious and Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin held the first formal discussion ever between our two countries devoted to arms control matters and that China will participate for the first time in the Committee of Disarmament in Geneva next month.

We have covered a great deal of ground during the last few days. For both sides much of it was new ground, at least it was new in terms of dealing with the other. Our two military establishments had not previously benefitted from the direct personal contact at the highest levels that has existed in other areas of the Sino-American relationship in recent years. Many of the discussions here lay the ground work for future relationships but on one subject above all I believe that this trip demonstrated the practical value and importance of the new relationship with China that exists since normalization. This was our discussion on Afghanistan. I will be able to report to President Carter that I found a growing convergence of views between our two governments on the outrageous and brutal invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union.

Last year Vice President Mondale talked to you during his press conference in this room about laying the basis for our relationship with the PRC in the 1980's. A relationship in which we would not only deepen and broaden our bilateral interactions but we would begin discussing frankly and productively areas in which we shared common strategic objectives.

There are a growing number of such areas and none more urgent than the area of South Asia about which we spent many hours conferring. I can say with assurance that our discussions have strengthened our mutual understanding of the situation in that region and of ways in which we can work together toward our common objectives. I would be glad to take a few questions.

Q: Sir, could you tell us if any concrete agreement was reached on this trip to deal with the Afghanistan situation or any developments which may come from it?

A: The consultations covered the reactions of each side to the situation. We find that we have views that are very closely parallel about the need to strengthen other nations in the region and each side will take appropriate steps on its own to that end. I don't think it is appropriate to detail either of those steps taken by each side at this time.

Q: Can you say as a result of your discussions that either one side or the other has modified its policies or its approach on these areas in which you have these converging views as a result of the position of the other side. Is there any tailoring of the policy or approach?

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A: I would say that each side has taken aboard the views expressed by the other. I think we have learned from the Chinese something of value about attitudes of various countries in the region with which they have close connections and I think they have a better idea of what we think is feasible in shoring up the security of South Asia. I again don't think I can be more specific than that. There are some specific facts and specific attitudes, that we have learned and I think my views have been modified some, I know that. Events will unfold.

Q: Deng Xiaoping said, I mean that there was a report, in which it seemed that he was urging the United States to do something somewhat more down-to-earth than what we have been talking about so far. Has he put forth any down-to-earth suggestions for United States action with Cambodia and Vietnam or has he suggested that China will take care of the down-to-earth actions there?

A: With respect to Southeast Asia, the PRC and the United States again have a parallelism of views. We both consider the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia with all the consequent brutality, the many many hundreds of thousands of deaths, we consider that Vietnamese invasion and aggression supported by the Soviet Union to be the central fact to which attention has to be called. We have done quite a lot in terms of urging others, because we have no relations with Vietnam ourselves, to impose economic penalties on Vietnam and it has been done.

We have been supplying humanitarian aid, we have been bolstering the Thai Government in terms of assistance, sales of military equipment, we made free. We have approved quite a lot in the way of additional military sales so as to help Thailand protect itself against the threat, the possibility that the war in Southeast Asia might expand. We have worked with the SEAN nations to apply diplomatic pressure against Vietnam. The Chinese have also, as is well known, applied pressure against Vietnam. And I consider what we have done to be quite down-to-earth, that is an area in which, as I say, both sides agree on the central fact. We may have somewhat differing views about individual aspects of the situation.

Q: When the British Defense Chief (inaudible) visited the Sixth Tank Division in 1978, he said that China and Britain had a common enemy in Moscow. Can you now say the same thing with regard to the United States and China?

A: The friendship between the United States and China is not directed against any other nation. It is aimed at helping to assure peace and helping to promote stability all over the world, in various parts of the world, that are threatened by a combination of internal instability and in some cases expansionism of some of their neighbors. As I say, it is not directed against anyone, it is directed at preserving something, namely, peace.

Q: Did you touch at all on the question of the possible supplying of China with American weaponry or weapons technology or any other kind of technology? I know that the statements issued said that you laid the groundwork for technological exchanges but what about the entire question of selling China arms? I know what our policy is now but what about down the line?

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A: Our policy, U.S. policy, remains that we have no plans to sell arms to the PRC, and indeed the subject of sales of weapons systems, or arms, did not come up. The subject of technology transfer did come up and was discussed very extensively. I think that real progress was made in the area of technology transfer. We have made it clear that on a case-by-case basis we are ready to consider transfer of technology to the PRC. That, for example, includes civilian technology which may in cases have potential military applications because at some level of fundamentality technology can be applied either to civil or to military purposes. We have made available, for example, the LANDSAT D technology to the PRC under safeguards which will assure that it is not immediately usable for military purposes, but certainly what they learn by working with that technology will improve their level of technology and therefore potentially their possible military technological advances. We're willing to consider other technology transfers and in the case of LANDSAT D, of course, that is something we would not transfer to the Soviet Union. There were, as I say, extensive discussions. I think we are going to be now in a much better position to understand what the Chinese interests are in technology, including technology of possible dual use and we will be ready to consider those.

Q: Mr. Secretary, in effecting these transfers of new technology to the Chinese, do you intend to do this within the framework of the COCOM organization or do you intend to bypass it?

A: No indeed, we do intend to work within COCOM and we believe what we have in mind can work in the COCOM framework. It is clear that we have to re-examine the whole technology transfer issue, because, as you are aware, as part of our reaction to Soviet actions in Afghanistan, we are reviewing technology transfer to the Soviet Union and are likely to be more restrictive in that. Well, that is no reason to be more restrictive with respect to the PRC.

Q: When is Chairman Hua coming to the United States? When is Vice Premier Geng coming to the United States? Why is he coming rather than your direct counterpart, Vice Premier Xu?

A: Well, with respect to Chairman Hua, the date is something that is being considered and I think we will wait until that is determined before any announcement is made. The same is true with respect to the visit of Vice Chairman Geng who has responsibilities in the military area which make him the most active counterpart that I have. That date also is under consideration and it will have to be worked out in terms of the convenience and schedules of the individuals involved.

Q: Is there a possibility that ships of the Seventh Fleet might make port calls in China in the near future and as part of your discussions on exchanges is there a possibility that some Chinese soldiers might be trained by the United States in some form or another?

A: Neither of those subjects came up during our discussions. As you know the first had come up earlier. It happened not to during these discussions, that is the question of ship visits. We have no plans for the training of Chinese military personnel as such. I would expect broader exchanges on a professional level of relatively senior individuals who would lecture on military subjects, perhaps during fairly extended stays in the other country. That is the closest that I can think of.

Q: Secretary Brown, I would like to ask two questions. First one in your opinion, what strategic motive did the Soviet Union have in invading Afghanistan? The second one, what impact will the Afghanistan event have on U.S. foreign policy?

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A: I think one can only speculate on Soviet strategic motives in the invasion of Afghanistan but some factors are rather clear. There was and is a very substantial insurgency within Afghanistan of elements devoted to independence and to the Islamic religion. The government, the Amin Government, which as a pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan, was having rather limited success in suppressing that insurgency. The Soviets must have been concerned about the possibility that the insurgency would succeed and they would be faced with an independent Islamic regime in a country bordering them, and conceivably they might even have had concerns about the spread of those sentiments across the border into the Islamic minorities in the Soviet Union. Apparently they found Amin neither effective enough nor subservient enough and concluded that it was expedient to invade Afghanistan and murder him and replace him. That was one set of motives and I don't know what weight to give it. But in addition to that particular set of motives which one might describe as avoiding negative results from the Soviet point of view, there were also motives of opportunity as I see it.

In converting Afghanistan as they are in the process of doing, or trying to do, from a historic buffer state, pro-Soviet but with some independence, into a puppet state occupied at present by at least 50,000 and in the future perhaps more than that number of Soviet troops, the Soviets may well have reasoned that they were creating opportunities for themselves and great risks and potential dangers for the rest of the world. The successful occupation and Sovietization of Afghanistan poses great potential threats to Pakistan and Iran. It offers the possibility by putting pressure on Pakistan, perhaps through insurgencies of minorities there which extend across the border into Afghanistan, of giving the Soviets an outlet on the Arabian Sea, an ambition that they have long cherished, going back to Czarist times, and one which if realized would threaten supply lines in the Indian Ocean both to Japan and to Europe from the oil fields of the Middle East.

Moreover, the Sovietization of Afghanistan also represents a grave threat to Iran which is, of course, not only a large oil producer itself but a very important key to the whole Persian Gulf. Indeed that is a great threat to Iran and one which we can only hope the authorities in Iran will realize is a big threat to Iranian independence and to Islamic nationalism in Iran. The opportunities posed to the Soviets in Pakistan and in Iran represent, I think, a very great temptation to them and I am sure that also played a part in their decision to invade Afghanistan.

Q: What areas of disagreement do we still have with the PRC?

A: Well, you may recall from things that they have said that they don't agree with us about our arms sales to the Taiwanese, for example. They also continue to have a formal objection to the presence of U.S., or concern, about U.S. troops in the Republic of Korea and I think they would approach the diplomatic situation there differently than we and I think there may be some others. I don't want to minimize those. I do believe that our talks during the past few days have allowed us to understand each other's viewpoints of these matters and inevitably I think that will lead to narrowing of those differences.

Q: Could you say which of those differences you discussed during your talks?

A: Not necessarily in my talks but in the counterpart talks, in some cases in my talks, and in some cases in the counterpart talks, those differences came up, and I think we had a useful exchange of views.

Thank you very much.

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